

## Eleven's Little Brother by Mozart\_the\_Meerkitten

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**Summary:**

During the excavation of the Bunker, Eleven discovers a mysterious blue egg that hatches into an even more mysterious creature. Eleven decides to take care of it- what else would one do with a baby shapeshifter?

# 1. The Mysterious Egg

## Author's Note:

Well hi again. So, uh, this story happened because I wanted to give El a friend, since she doesn't have the Hawkins AV club to hang out with, and Shifty popped into my head. I wrote this first chapter while I was very tired, so forgive it if it isn't the best. There's no grand adventure going on here, just the gang trying to figure out how to be a family and El adopting them a new member.

Things turn out a lot differently with Shifty when Ford and Fiddleford have not only Stan around but their 10-year-old daughter who was raised as a science experiment in a lab.

And this fic is dedicated to all the people on tumblr who I discovered were righteously angry about Ford's treatment of Shifty after I made a post about Into the Bunker.

Eleven was digging in a pile of dirt.

She was digging because Stan had told her that people used to bury treasure all the time, and if she looked in the dirt she might find some.

There was a pile of dirt because everyone had decided that, after the incident with the Demogorgon and the bad men both chasing them in the woods, they needed some sort of secret hiding place in case they were ever in trouble again. Ford and Fiddleford called it a bunker. Stan called it a smuggler's cave. El knew what a smuggler was now, because she had seen Star Wars.

So El was digging in the dirt, looking for treasure, while her (dads? uncles? They kept arguing about what she was supposed to call them, so she just called them by their names) worked on the bunker. They had found a great big cave underground to use for it,

but they still had to dig out space for all Fiddleford's machines and Ford's ideas.

She was mostly using her hands, since she didn't want to miss anything. Stan had given her a shovel, but she'd decided it was too big and awkward.

A very big clump of dirt broke away from her pile and rolled to a stop beside her. El sat back and picked it up, inspecting it. It seemed very solid for just dirt. Maybe there was a rock inside?

Or maybe treasure?

Just to be safe, El carefully rubbed away the dirt with her coat sleeve. She was glad of that a few moments later when she unearthed a pale blue color. She rubbed the dirt away more quickly and soon it was cascading off the blue stone.

When it was as clean as El could make it, she held up the stone. It was very pretty, and sort of a shape she recognized. It had to be treasure, it was too nice to be anything else.

It felt strange though, almost like...

... like it was alive.

Maybe it was an anomaly-rock-treasure. If that was the case then she should show it to Ford. He always knew what to do about that sort of thing.

Mind made up, El nodded. She put the anomaly-rock-treasure in her inside coat pocket and trotted down the steps into the bunker.

She found Ford scribbling on a paper at his desk. Stan and Fiddleford thought it was silly that he had brought a desk down here before the bunker was even finished and told Ford that he was in charge of moving it whenever it was in the way. So far he hadn't needed to.

El walked up and tugged on his coat sleeve. "Ford."

"Sorry, El, I'm busy," said Ford, not looking up from his papers.

El tugged his sleeve again. "Please?"

Ford sighed. "Why don't you go find Stan or Fiddleford and ask them for help, alright? I need to finish these calculations."

"But-"

"I'll be done in a little while, El, go find Stan or Fiddleford."

El frowned, but walked away. She felt nervousness bubbling up in her and pushed it back down, telling herself she could annoy Ford all day and he wouldn't hurt her. Still, she didn't want to make him angry.

El didn't see Stan or Fiddleford around so she walked through the not-on security room into the "observation room". Or that's what it would be when it was finished. She decided she would observe her anomaly-rock-treasure inside until someone found her and told her what it was.

El took the rock out and set it on the table. More of the dirt had come off and it was an even brighter blue than she had first thought. It was beautiful. She smiled at it. The others would be proud of her (even Ford) when she showed to them.

She was turning the rock when she noticed something alarming. There was a crack on one side of it. She frowned. She didn't remember seeing a crack there before. Had she broken it? Worry crept back up on her and she tried to brush more dirt over the crack to hide it. If Ford or Fiddleford found out she broke something important they might not let her help with inventions and specimens and other "nerd stuff" anymore.

However, even as she tried to pat more dirt over the crack it widened! El pulled back, eyes wide. More cracks appeared all over the rock, much to her dismay.

No, no, no, no! It couldn't break! She hadn't even gotten to show anyone! She should have carried it, she broke it, broke, broke, bad, bad, bad-

Suddenly the top popped off the egg. El watched as a small, not-quite-clear creature suddenly peeked out of it, red eyes blinking slowly.

Oh.

Oh.

It wasn't a rock, it was an egg!

The small creature pushed the rest of the eggshell away and slid out, much like an egg yolk. Unlike an egg yolk though, this had eyes and teeth, and what might have been legs. El watched as it looked around.

"Hi," she said, quietly. It looked at her. She smiled.

The little creature scooted backwards, towards the remains of its egg. Was it scared? El stuck out a hand, palm down, like Fiddleford told her she should do when she met a cat or dog. And just like a cat or dog, the creature leaned forward slightly like it was sniffing her. She stretched out her fingers and gently ran them over its head.

It seemed to like that and leaned into her touch. El smiled a little more and considered it. It looked like it should be slimy, but it felt smooth. As she pet it it let out a tiny vibration, like a cat purring.

El took her hand back and reached into one of her coat pockets. She pulled out a small notebook and pencil and started to write. Fiddleford said that she should work on her writing, and Ford always kept a journal of anomalies, so she had decided she would write down strange things too. This definitely qualified.

She wrote:

*'Litl creachr, hatch from egg, prety blu egg*

*Red eyes*

*Litl teth*

*Purs lik cat*

*Lik be pet'*

El nodded, pleased with her observations, and set down her pencil and notebook. Before she could do anything else, however, the creature suddenly morphed into an exact copy of her pencil.

El's mouth fell open. She gently poked the creature-pencil with her real pencil's eraser and just like that it transformed back into the not-quite-clear egg yolk with eyes.

El quickly added to her list of observations:

*'Turnt in to pensil!'*

She sat her notebook down and pointed at it. "Watch."

The creature watched as she levitated the notebook. Maybe she imagined it, but she thought she saw its eyes widen too.

She pointed at herself and then at it and said, cheerfully, "Freaks!"

The creature made the little vibrating sound again and she smiled at it.

El put her notebook and pencil back into her pocket and set her hands on the table in a clear invitation. After a moment the creature climb-slid into her hands and sat there, watching her.

"Good," she told it, running her fingers gently over its head. She held it close to her chest and laughed a little when it vibrated more.

"What'cha got there, El?"

She jumped a little and quickly brushed aside her guilty feelings. She didn't have to hide anything here. She turned to Fiddleford, who was watching her curiously.

She held up the little creature. "Anomaly-friend."

Fiddleford blinked rapidly. "El, what is that?"

El shrugged. She set the creature on her lap, pulled out her

notebook and handed it to Fiddleford.

He read her notes a few times before he looked back at her. "It turned into your *pencil*?"

El nodded solemnly.

Fiddleford ran a hand through his hair. "You found a *shapeshifter*."

El tilted her head. "Shapeshifter?"

Fiddleford nodded and drooped like a wilted flower. "It's a critter that can change into something else, objects or-" he tugged at his hair. "People."

El inspected the tiny shapeshifter and shook her head. "Too little."

Fiddleford snorted then sighed. "Yer probably right, El. Alright, well, if yer gonna keep it then you better find a blanket or somethin' to keep it warm in. It hasn't got any fur or a coat like you so it'll get cold."

El's eyes widened. She remembered the lab and how cold it had always been. She held the shapeshifter a little closer. She didn't want it to be cold like that.

An idea came to her. Carefully, she set the shapeshifter into one of her inside jacket pockets. It gazed up at her for a moment, then looked around curiously.

Fiddleford did one of his nervous laughs and she looked back at him. He was shaking his head. "Course you'd find a shapeshifter," he muttered. "Not like we ain't weird enough as it is, now we got a shapeshifter fer a pet."

El looked at him hopefully. "Keep it?"

Fiddleford sighed again. "Well it ain't my first choice but I guess, I guess we really can't leave it here by itself. When you dug it out you didn't see a nest around or anythin'?"

El shook her head.

Fiddleford nodded resignedly. "Figures. Did you show Stanford?"

El frowned. "Wouldn't listen."

"Wait, y'mean you had that critter with you and Stanford didn't pay you any mind?" Fiddleford looked worried again. "He

must be sick or somethin'."

"Was an egg," said El.

"Ohh, I see," Fiddleford nodded. "Still, y'would think Stanford would wanna know about a weird egg."

Suddenly Fiddleford's eyes lit up and he grinned. "I got an idea. How's about you go find Stan and get him to take you home. Take the little critter with you. I got a few more things t'finish with the security room so I'll stay. Then I'll tell Stanford what you found on the way home. It'll drive him crazy. How's that sound?"

El tilted her head, a small smile tugging at her lips. "Prank?" Stan had been teaching her about pranks. They were fun (most of the time).

"Yeah, sorta," Fiddleford grinned. "We'll get him real good. Stan'll love that."

El grinned back. "Okay." She looked down at the shapeshifter. "Prank Ford. Fun."

The shapeshifter made a little chirping sound like a bird. She patted its head. She needed a name for it.

"Alright, you two go on, I'll see ya later," said Fiddleford, still grinning. El nodded, and with the little shapeshifter safely in her pocket, she hurried off to find Stan.



## 2. Shifty

### Notes for the Chapter:

Alright, here's chapter two. Thank you for all your comments and kudos! They are greatly appreciated.

Eleven found Stan in the storage room, moving boxes. She waited patiently until he turned and saw her so she wouldn't get in the way. He stopped and leaned on a stack of the boxes, grinning at her.

"Hey kid. What's with the smug look?"

El walked up to him and tilted her head. "Smug?"

"Means you look like you're real pleased about something," said Stan.

El grinned. "Prank Ford!"

Stan snorted. "Alright, I'm on board with that. How, exactly?"

"With shapeshifter," said El, opening her coat and revealing her new little friend.

"Woah!" Stan leaned down to look. "That's a funky little critter you got there."

El nodded. "Shapeshifter," she repeated. "Turned into pencil. Needs name."

Stan was good with names. He had given nicknames to everyone, including her, and she knew he was the right person to come up with one for the shapeshifter.

"Hmm," Stan tapped his chin. "How 'bout we call it Shifty, since it's a shapeshifter?"

El looked down at the creature. It stared up at her with big red eyes. "Shifty?"

The little shapeshifter chirped again. El smiled and nodded, looking back to Stan. "Shifty."

"Alright then. So, how're we using Shifty to prank Ford?"

"Ford doesn't know."

"Doesn't know what?"

“About Shifty. Wouldn’t listen.”

“You’re kidding me,” Stan said, looking like he was about to laugh. “Sixer ignored you when you had a real live anomaly with ya?”

El nodded. “Was egg.”

“Okay, but still. Oh man, this,” Stan shook his head. “So many possibilities. What’cha got in mind, kid?”

“Fiddleford said go home with you,” El said. “Fiddleford tells Ford later. Drive Ford crazy.”

Stan did laugh now. El loved Stan’s laughs. She smiled whenever she heard one.

“Oh this is perfect, okay kid, let me just finish up here and we’ll head back,” said Stan. “Make sure ya keep your little friend hidden.”

A few minutes later Stan smuggled them through the bunker. Not that they needed much smuggling, since Ford was nowhere to be found. They did see Fiddleford though, and the three of them exchanged looks. El wasn’t sure what the looks meant, but she liked raising her eyebrows up and grinning like they did.

The trek home through the forest was uneventful. Every few minutes El pulled her coat open and looked at Shifty curled up in her pocket. The little creature fell asleep after a while. It was cute, she thought (she knew what cute meant now, because that’s what Stan and Fiddleford called her sometimes).

She held Stan’s hand as they walked, which was nice. It made her feel safe and warm inside, even though it was cold out.

They arrived at the cabin about half an hour later. Eleven took her shoes off inside, but left her coat on so as not to wake Shifty.

“What should we have for supper, kid?” Stan asked after she followed him into the kitchen.

“Eggos,” said El, without hesitation. Stan had bought some about a month ago and they had been her favorite food ever since.

Stan snorted. “No way, Fidds’ll kill me if I let you do that again.”

El shrugged. It had been worth a try.

Stan opened the fridge. "Wonder what your shapeshifter eats?"

El peeked at Shifty, still asleep in her pocket. He had very sharp little teeth, Ford said that most things with sharp teeth ate meat (and Fiddleford said to avoid anything with sharp teeth big enough to eat *her*). "Meat?"

"Hmm," Stan pulled his head out of the fridge. "We could have hamburgers."

El nodded. She liked hamburgers.

Stan pulled a bag out of the freezer. "Hey, we even got fries! This is lookin' up, kid!" he set the fries and the burger on the counter and ruffled her hair. She grinned a little. Stan ruffling her hair was still new since until recently her hair had been too short to ruffle. She wondered if Shifty would grow hair so she could do it to him too.

Shifty woke up as Stan was cooking the burgers. He wiggled and chirped and El picked him up and took him out of her pocket. She set him on the table and he looked around curiously, then turned back to her and made a little "chirrrr" noise that sounded almost like a question.

"Home," said El, waving her hand at the house around them. Then she realized she hadn't introduced Shifty to anyone yet. She pointed at Stan. "Stan, short for Stanley," she pointed at herself. "El short for Eleven," she pointed at Shifty and smiled. "Shifty, short for Shapeshifter."

Shifty chirped and scooted towards her. She picked him up again and held him against her chest. He vibrated and shut his eyes. She decided he must be happy.

Soon supper was ready. Stan helped her dish up her food then pulled out a small plate from the cupboard.

"And for your little friend," said Stan, making his voice sound "dramatic" like he did when he was telling a story. "Have the tiniest burger ever made."

Stan set the plate down on the table with what was, indeed, the tiniest burger. It even had little torn off pieces of bread sandwiching it to make a bun. El grinned and set Shifty by it,

pointing to the plate. “Yours.”

Stan sat down across from them and El took a bite of her food, watching Shifty. The little shapeshifter made a series of chirps, coos and clicks, then launched himself face-first at the top of the burger, gnawing at it with his little teeth.

Eleven tried not to laugh and nearly choked on her food.

Stan was also trying not to laugh, but with less choking involved. “Jeeze, I guess I shoulda broken it up some.”

El set her burger down and pulled Shifty’s away from him. Shifty protested with a long little whine, but chirped excitedly when El presented him with the torn shreds of the burger. He was more successful this time. El went back to her own food, but tore apart a couple fries to give to her little friend as well.

When they had finished, El put Shifty back in her pocket, where he fell asleep almost immediately.

She was helping Stan clean up when the door slammed open.

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Ford and Fiddleford walked through the woods on their way back to the cabin. Fiddleford was trying very hard to conceal his eagerness, which was aided by the fact that Ford was already distracted, somehow managing to both walk and write in a notepad without running into any trees.

Fiddleford managed to wait until they were about ten minutes away from the bunker before he casually started the conversation.

“So, anythin’ interesting happen today, Stanford?”

Ford shrugged, not looking up from his notepad. “Nothing noteworthy.”

“Eleven said you were ignoring her earlier,” Fiddleford continued.

“I was busy,” said Ford. “She didn’t seem to be in distress and I knew you and Stan were nearby.”

"Maybe you shoulda paid a little more attention to her."

Ford sighed. "I thought we had established that I am the least qualified person to care for a child."

"I'm just sayin', you probably would've liked what she had to show you," said Fiddleford with a shrug.

"What do you mean?" said Ford, finally looking up at him.

"Oh, she had an anomaly she wanted to show you," said Fiddleford, looking up at the trees. "But you were too busy to pay her any mind, so she left ya be."

"An anomaly?" said Ford. "What kind of anomaly?"

"Well, it was an egg when she found you," said Fiddleford. "Hatched into somethin' though."

"*Eleven found an egg that hatched?!*"

"Mhm, reckon that's what I said."

"And you didn't come tell me?!"

With a great effort, Fiddleford kept his face neutral. "You were busy, if y'recall."

He glanced at Ford and was amused to see that his friend was completely stunned. And maybe a little bit chastised, which was good, since Ford tended towards pride more often than not.

"I can't believe this," said Ford. "Eleven actually found an anomaly and I ignored her."

Fiddleford nodded. "Yer a terrible parent," he said with mock-solemnity.

Ford rolled his eyes. "I prefer uncle, it's a title with less responsibility attached. What did the egg hatch into?"

Fiddleford couldn't quite hide his grin. "A shapeshifter."

Ford's footsteps stopped. Fiddleford stopped as well and turned to him. Ford stared at him in shock.

"A *shapeshifter?!*" Ford repeated. "Eleven found a *shapeshifter?!*"

"That's what I said."

Ford pressed a hand to his forehead and absently ran it through his hair, making it stand up even more than normal. "I'm

never going to be able to ignore her again. I've never even considered the idea of a child making discoveries like that."

"Ford, yer brother said you've been huntin' monsters since you were kids, and it stands to reason that kids ain't changed very much in twenty years."

"I suppose I just thought we were the exceptions," said Ford. Then he shook his head. "Wait, where is the shapeshifter now?"

"Back at home. Stan took it and El back to make supper," Fiddleford was really grinning now.

"Well then what are we waiting for?! Come on, Fiddleford, we have an anomaly to observe!"

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

If you have never seen a baby animal trying to eat solid food for the first time I highly recommend it. Kittens, for instance, shove their entire faces into whatever you give them, which is messy but very entertaining.

And Ford is fun to mess with in low-stakes non-harmful situations. xD

### 3. No Tests Allowed

#### Notes for the Chapter:

In which Ford is Ford and Eleven is a good big sister.

Ford burst through the front door. "Eleven!" he shouted, without preamble.

Stan's voice answered him. "We're doing fine, thanks Ford. We're in the kitchen."

Ford, without bothering to take off his coat or shoes, hurried to the kitchen. Fiddleford stepped in after him much more calmly, looking amused as he took off his coat and boots.

Ford appeared in the doorway of the kitchen, looking as if he might have run all the way from the bunker. "Eleven, I—"

"Shh," said Eleven, pressing a finger to her lips.

Ford blinked. "I, er,"

"Shh," Eleven repeated. "Shifty sleeping."

Ford gaped at her. "What?"

"That's what we're calling the shapeshifter," said Stan. He raised an eyebrow. "Fidds told you about the shapeshifter, right?"

"Would I be this excited if he hadn't?" Ford asked.

Stan shrugged. "Could be. You get excited over some weird things, Sixer."

Ford rolled his eyes and walked over to Eleven, kneeling down in front of her. "Can I see?"

Eleven stared at him intensely for a moment, then nodded. "Quiet," she instructed.

Ford nodded. El opened her jacket. At first, Ford saw nothing, but then he detected a small movement in one of El's pockets. He carefully leaned over it to see and a second later gasped with delight.

Without warning, Ford sprang to his feet and began pacing the kitchen. "Incredible, absolutely remarkable," he turned to El. "It hatched from an egg?"

El nodded. "Blue egg. This big," she gestured with her hands.

“And turned into your pencil?”

“Mhm,” El watched him curiously.

“I wonder what else it can turn into,” said Ford.

Fiddleford had crept in in the wake of Ford’s excitement. He acquired a burger from Stan and sat down at the table. “Don’t reckon it could turn into anythin’ very big,” he mused.

“We don’t know it’s limited by size though,” said Ford. “Or that it’s limited by anything. Can it change into animals as well as inanimate objects? Can it simply look at something and change into it or does it have to touch the thing first? How complex of an object can it change into? Does its DNA change as well? I’ll have to conduct some tests.”

“Tests?” said a small voice.

They all turned to Eleven, who suddenly looked very worried and very guarded.

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Eleven stared at them, something between fear and anger rising in her. Her eyes darted between the three men then settled on Ford.

“Not like the tests those jerk scientists did on you, kid,” said Stan.

“What kind then?” El asked, still staring intently at Ford.

Ford shook his head quickly. “Stanley’s right, I didn’t mean, I didn’t mean like that. I just meant that, er...”

“I think Stanford means more like observational tests,” said Fiddleford. Eleven’s eyes darted to him.

“Obser-vational?” she repeated.

“Yeah, like, tests y’d do just by watchin’ how a person reacts to somethin’,” said Fiddleford. “Like if we set you in a room with a pile a’books and some coloring pages and then kept an eye on you to see what you liked doin’ better.”

“Er, yes, right,” said Ford. “It’s- it’s like how I told you before that I like to observe creatures in the forest, except the shapeshifter is



in our house. And since the house is a controlled environment instead of an unpredictable forest, it becomes a test.”

Eleven glanced between the three of them again. She hadn’t understood all the words Ford said, but she thought she knew what he meant.

Somehow, though, she knew that wasn’t what he had meant to say at first. For the first time in months she felt scared of Ford, which made her sad because he was nice, most of the time.

And Shifty was just a baby. He couldn’t tell them things about himself like she could. What if Ford did something that scared him but he couldn’t do anything about it?

“You okay, kid?”

They were staring at her. She had been quiet for a long time, she realized. Stan was kneeling in front of her, looking worried.

Eleven had had tests done on her her whole life. She knew which ones were bad. So until Shifty was old enough to tell them herself she would have to help him.

She would keep him safe.

El looked up at them all and summoned her most determined voice. “Want to help.”

There was a pause, then, “Help with what, kid?”

“Observation tests,” said Eleven, pronouncing the words very carefully.

Now Ford looked worried. “I don’t know if-”

“That’s a great idea!” said Fiddleford, talking over him and shooting Ford a Look. Ford shut up. Fiddleford turned and smiled at her. She smiled back, just a little. She opened her jacket and looked down at Shifty, still asleep, and nodded to herself.

She would keep him safe.

“Bedtime, squirts!”

Eleven looked up at the sound of Stan’s voice. She was sitting on the floor in the living room, showing Shifty Ford and Fiddleford’s board game with all its funny pieces. So far Shifty had been able to change into all of them.

“Bed time,” she informed Shifty, scooping him up. She turned and headed towards the stairs where Stan was standing. He grinned and ruffled her hair as she went past. She grinned back.

She put Shifty in her pocket while she got ready for bed. While she changed into her pajamas she put the coat on the bed and Shifty crawled out. He looked around curiously, but stayed where she left him.

She had just finished changing when she heard a soft knock. El frowned. Fiddleford never knocked when he came in, since this was his room too, and Stan’s knocks were louder than that. Trying to ignore the way her stomach seemed to twist she called softly, “Come in.”

Ford walked inside, carrying a small metal cage. Eleven frowned at it.

“I brought you this to keep Shifty in at night, until we can find something more suitable,” said Ford, setting the cage next to her bed.

Eleven wrinkled her nose. “Why?”

“Well, this way you don’t have to worry about him wandering off in the middle of the night and finding something dangerous that might hurt him,” said Ford. “It’s a very common practice with baby animals.”

El considered this. Ford made sense but something still seemed wrong.

But since she couldn’t figure out what it was, she shrugged. “Okay.”

Ford smiled at her, but he looked worried again, in a way he hadn’t since the first time he’d knocked on the door of her bedroom.

Like they were strangers again. It made her sad.

“Fiddleford said he’d be up in a minute,” said Ford.

“Okay.”

“Well, er, goodnight.”

“Goodnight,” Eleven said softly as Ford hurried off.

Eleven sat on her bed and sighed. She felt Shifty bump into her hand and she reached down and picked him up.

Then she took a deep breath and got down on the floor. She inspected the cage. It was clean and had a towel in one corner of it. In another was a bowl of water with a bowl of what smelled like bacon beside it. Ah. So that was why Stan had been making bacon earlier.

Eleven gently set Shifty inside, on top of the towel. “You sleep, here,” she said, pointing at the floor of the cage. Shifty chirped and looked around.

Fiddleford came up. El sat on the floor with Shifty for a few minutes as he got ready, then picked her little friend back up and sat on the bed with him.

“Story time,” she announced. Fiddleford came and sat beside them, almost-smiling as he held a book in his hand. They were reading through The Chronicles of Narnia now, and were on The Voyage of the Dawn Treader. El liked the stories about children having adventures almost more than she liked stories about hobbits and dwarves having adventures.

El snuggled up to Fiddleford and listened as he read. Shifty snuggled up to her and listened too.

When they finished the story El got up. Hesitantly she sat down in front of Shifty’s cage and looked into it again. It still seemed wrong, and she still wasn’t sure why.

“Ford bring that up?”

Eleven looked at Fiddleford and nodded.

Fiddleford smiled a little. “Stanford means well, y’know?”

Eleven nodded again. “Scares me, a little,” she said very

quietly.

Fiddleford's smile disappeared and he looked sad too. "Aw, El. He'd- you know he'd never hurt you, right?"

El tried to think of the right words. "Yes," she said, slowly. "But might hurt Shifty by accident."

"Well, we'll keep a real close eye on him, okay? On Ford and on Shifty," said Fiddleford. "You an' me can make sure nothin' bad happens, alright?"

"Okay." El took a deep breath. Gently, she set Shifty in his cage and latched the door. Shifty made a confused little noise, like a question, and El shook her head.

"Sleep," she said. "Night."

El hopped onto her bed and curled up. Fiddleford tucked her in, then went and laid down in his own bed. El sighed and shut her eyes.

For several minutes there was silence. El could feel herself beginning to drift off.

Then a wail rent the air.

Eleven jerked up, heart pounding. Fiddleford yelped.

The wail came again, louder, and scared, very scared, Eleven knew all about scared noises.

El heard footsteps and the light flicked on. Fiddleford stood next to it, blinking, without his glasses on. El scrambled up as another wail rent the air and thumped down next to Shifty's cage. She fought with the latch for a moment, then reached in and pulled out the very scared little shapeshifter.

Shifty was quivering. He gave an uncertain chirp and El stroked his head gently. Fiddleford came and sat down in front of them.

"I fergot how loud such a little critter can be when it's upset," said Fiddleford. "We got a dog once when it was a puppy and it wailed like that at first," he laughed a little and rubbed his eyes. "Us

kids couldn't stand it, so even though our pa had told us to keep the pup downstairs in its kennel every night one of us would creep down, take it out and carry it back to our room. Then we put him back in the mornin' before pa could see. We thought we was so sneaky, but we found out years later that pa knew what we were doin' all along. Turns out he didn't have the heart to hear the little feller cry all night either."

El smiled a little. She could feel herself calming down. Shifty was calming down too, and his quivers were slowly turning into little vibrations.

"That little critter seems mighty fond of you," said Fiddleford. "I bet he'll stay with ya all night if ya keep him out here."

El looked at him hopefully. "Can I?"

"Sure," he smiled. "Worked out for me anyway."

El smiled back. She climbed up onto her bed and stuck Shifty next to her pillow. "Stay with me. All night."

Shifty chirped happily and nuzzled up against her as she lied down, vibrating excitedly. El laughed a little. Fiddleford tucked them in again and she shut her eyes.

Shifty did not make a sound the rest of the night.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

So, ah, I've had a lot of pets over the years and I was thinking to myself one day, what if whenever Ford left the bunker for the night Shifty cried for him? I mean, baby animals and baby humans often cry when left alone, and Ford and Fiddleford would just leave. for hours. And for someone who knows a bit about child psychology and what happens when babies cries go consistently unanswered the implications of that are kind of horrifying.

But Eleven's here now, and she's not gonna let that happen.

Also in defense of the Mystery Trio (mostly Ford) they don't actually know what level of sentience

Shifty has at this point, so treating/referring to him like a baby animal is not unreasonable. (which still doesn't excuse canon Ford from leaving him alone in a bunker for hours on end, that's just generally bad whether you have a baby animal or a baby human.)

I hope you're enjoying! If you are please let me know.